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SUBJECT: CUBA RELEASES 6 DETAINEES WHO COMPLETED SENTENCES

Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly; Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (U) On April 24, the Cuban regime released from detention six of its citizens that it had arrested in July of 2005: Lazaro Alonso Roman, Manuel Perez Soria, Elio Enrique Chavez Ramon, Jose Diaz Silva, Emilio Leyva Perez, and Dulian Ramirez Ballester. The arrests in July 2005 were for peaceful protests to commemorate the anniversary of the regime's sinking of a tugboat in 1994, killing 42 intending immigrants; and also for a peaceful protest outside the French Embassy on Bastille Day. Those released had served their sentences. Over the weekend the GOC released Jorge Luis Garcia Perez, known as "Antunez" one month after he completed his 17-year sentence. His original arrest was for saying "Down with Fidel" into a microphone at a social event.

¶2. (C) Leading dissidents have told us that these releases represent no change in the regime's repressive character. Martha Beatriz Roque (MBR), who alerted us to the fact that the Spanish Embassy was advertising to EU members that the releases demonstrate concrete results from FonMin Moratinos's visit in early April, said that neither the Spanish nor the Cuban regime deserve any credit. In her words: "Let's not let ourselves be fooled by this device whereby they show us that they are releasing prisoners when they've all completed their sentences, or even spent more time than sentenced, as in the case of Antunez. If the Spanish want to attribute this to the Moratinos visit, we cannot permit them, and for this reason we shouldn't say the individuals were 'freed,' but rather that they simply served their time....The Cuban government uses language in a way that confuses all who let themselves be confused." MBR coordinated this message with most of the other signers of the democratic opposition's "Unity Document." Ciego de Avila-based Human rights activist Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leyva, visiting USINT April 25, commented along these same lines. "It's a charade," is how he put it.

¶3. (C) Comment: It is not a coincidence that the Cuban regime would let these detainees walk during the very week that European Heads of Mission are putting their final touches on the paper they will send up to the EU for the upcoming ministerial meeting that will review the EU common position on Cuba. The Polish Charge told us April 24 that views among the EU member missions were divided and that consensus was not likely. His worry was that EU President Germany would draft a document that sees the glass half full, leaving objections from countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Sweden (and maybe The Netherlands) to a separate "reservations" section. Our message to the Europeans and to media should be similar to what MBR and the

other dissidents are saying:

-- We are happy for those that are released.

-- There are still 280 political prisoners in Cuba who should be released immediately.

-- Neither the 280 still imprisoned, nor the six who were just released (seven, if you count Antunez) should ever have been arrested in the first place.

-- New arrests and detentions without due process are evidence that nothing fundamental has changed in the nature of Cuba's police-state regime.

PARMLY